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Courtesy Jimmy Yamachi

## CAMP TULE LAKE

# Dark WWII story to see light of day

**Top:** Dave Menke of the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge examines the remains of a work camp building. **Above:** The guard tower at its time loomed over Camp Tule Lake.

See a video about Camp Tule Lake at [sfgate.com](http://sfgate.com).

**By Carolyn Jones**  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

TULELAKE, Siskiyou County — It is hard to imagine a place more forsaken and derelict than Camp Tule Lake.

Rat droppings are piled in the corners. Bobcat tracks in the snow lead to a den under the floorboards. The windows are shattered and rotten beams hang precariously from the ceiling.

But 60 years ago, these barracks housed many people the U.S. government believed to be dire threats to national security during World War II.

About 18,000 “disloyal” Japanese Americans and transplants from Japan — as well as 800 German officers and 150 Italian prisoners of war — spent the war years here and at nearby Tule Lake Segregation Center.

“If this was allowed to happen once, during a time of national hysteria, it can happen again. It almost did after 9/11,” said Dave Misso, a retired Tulelake school janitor who is among those who have crusaded to preserve the sites. “That’s why it’s so important that this history not be forgotten.”

The dark history of the Tule Lake prison camps will soon be memorialized with a visitors’ center,

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# Dark WWII history to see light of day

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tours, Web site and other tools intended to explain how thousands of Americans came to be imprisoned there.

Thanks in part to the work of Tule Lake survivors and their families, dozens of whom live in the Bay Area, the two camps were named national parks in December as part of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, freeing federal funds for preservation.

"It's about time," said Hiroshi Shimizu, who spent his childhood at the Tule Lake Segregation Center and now works at the San Francisco SPCA. "If there's one story that needs to be told, it's the story of Tule Lake."

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt signed an order sending 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry — most of them citizens — into internment camps for the duration of the war, allegedly for their own protection but also due to fears they would send classified information to Japan.

Although most lost their

## Remembrance

Japanese Americans will hold a ceremony today in San Francisco to remember the World War II internment. The annual Day of Remembrance will be from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Sundance Kabuki Theater, 1881 Post St., followed by a reception at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, 1840 Sutter St. For information, call (415) 921-5007 or go to [www.dayofremembrance.org](http://www.dayofremembrance.org).

homes, businesses and belongings when they left, few protested because they did not want to be viewed as unpatriotic. The government gave the internees a survey, and those who answered "no" to one of two questions were deemed disloyal and sent to the largest, longest-running and most high security of the country's 10 internment camps, Tule Lake.

The questions asked if the internee would be willing to serve in the U.S. armed forces, potentially fighting in Japan, and if he or she would fore-swear allegiance to the Japanese emperor. The "no-nos" and their families spent the



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**Jimmy Yamaichi (left) was sent to Camp Tule Lake with his parents when he was 21. Hiroshi Shimizu (right) spent his childhood at the segregation center. Yamaichi now lives in San Jose where this picture was taken; Shimizu works for the San Francisco SPCA.**

next four years surrounded by barbed wire, 28 guard towers and 1,200 armed soldiers on a desolate plain just south of the Oregon border.

Ruled under martial law, the camp was the site of strikes, riots, food shortages and, in 1944, a mass renunciation of U.S. citizenship.

Meanwhile, down the road at Camp Tule Lake, German and Italian prisoners of war were permitted to leave the barracks, work on local ranches and farms, and even dine with local families. Some dated local girls,

and after the war held reunions with their new friends.

Tule Lake was a very different experience for Japanese Americans, former internees said.

"It was a jail," said Jimi Yamaichi, a retired carpenter from San Jose who went to Tule Lake with his family when he was 21. "Everything that was personal or recreational was taken away from us. The conditions we lived under — the trauma our parents went through was tremendous."

The trauma did not end with

the war. Upon returning home, Tule Lake survivors were ostracized by many in the Japanese American community because they were considered unpatriotic, said Floyd Mori, national executive director of the Japanese American Citizens League.

"The resisters sent to Tule Lake were labeled as trouble-makers and, until recently, carried a stigma," he said. "But these were actually people of great principle and conscience."

The stigma is one reason the government and Japanese Americans have taken so long to recognize Tule Lake, Shimizu said. Most of the other camps on public property already have been preserved, including national parks at Manzanar and Minidoka.

But the controversial history of Tule Lake is precisely why we need to remember it, he said.

"Those people who went to Tule Lake, who protested their incarceration, were actually very, very American," he said. "The very essence of being American is your right to protest."

In some cases, Tule Lake internees answered "no" to the loyalty questions because they were coerced, Shimizu and Yamaichi said. In other cases, respondents did not understand the questions, had strong

ties to Japan and did not want to fight there — or felt, as U.S. citizens, they had a constitutional right not to be imprisoned without a trial.

Not much remains of the internment camp. Most of it was demolished after the war, and many of the barracks were given to homesteaders. The windswept 7,400-acre site is mostly empty except for a few Caltrans warehouses, a concrete foundation where a latrine used to be, a crumbling stockade and a lone cross on a hill.

Camp Tule Lake, where Germans, Italians and some Japanese Americans were housed, will be restored. Built in 1937 as a California Conservation Corps barracks, the compound was used as a government sign shop after the war and abandoned entirely in 1974.

The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will oversee the preservation.

"We think it's important to save Tule Lake because it's a very different, very painful story," said Dave Kruse, superintendent of nearby Lava Beds National Monument, which will administer the Tule Lake park. "And as we all know, if you don't know your history, you're doomed to repeat it."

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